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## 2020 Parents of Current and Prospective Students and COVID-19

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**PARENTS OF CURRENT AND  
PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS AND COVID-19**

May 2020



## BACKGROUND

Studies have been conducted among prospective and college students about the impact COVID-19 might have on their college plans. However, given that parents have a great deal of influence on their students, we wanted to understand their thoughts and concerns about COVID-19 as it relates to their students' education.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

An online survey was included in an email to the Mountaineer Parents Club and posted on the website. The survey elicited over 500 responses.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Parents have relied on a number of resources to learn how WVU is dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, but Mountaineer Parents Club and social media have been the most utilized, by far. Significantly more parents of prospective students rely on the latter, as well as student emails and WVU Admissions.

WVU's strong communication with parents has likely contributed to WVU's reputation remaining intact throughout the pandemic. In fact, it has even led some parents to think more positively about the University. One caveat is WVU's transition to online classes in March. Poor communication and lack of flexibility from professors, the inability to get discounted tuition and, in some cases, the lack of information regarding online classes this summer, have angered some parents.

Most parents still expect their student to attend WVU in the fall, and evidently COVID-19 has had little impact on their students' decision. For the most part, parents are comfortable with that decision, but they are still anxious about the situation. This is particularly true of those whose students will be freshmen. The majority want additional information regarding what WVU will do to ensure their students' safety during the pandemic, and many want assurance that in-person classes will not go on-line.

Out-of-state parents are particularly concerned about the last possibility, not only because switching to online classes would diminish their student's college experience, but also because they are financially strapped. The majority acknowledged COVID-19 has negatively impacted their financial situation in a number of ways, whether it's been the loss of income from a furlough or lay-off or the overall decline in value of their investments, among other issues.



Parents are clamoring for answers to these questions in relation to COVID-19.

- What will classrooms look like
- What precautions will be taken in the residence and dining halls and classrooms
- How will outbreaks be handled if they occur
- Will WVU guarantee that classes will not switch from in-person to online
- How will social distancing be enforced
- What resources will be available for ill students
- Will checking temperatures/ testing be done
- How would student absences from COVID-19 be dealt with
- How will WVU handle students who need to be quarantined
- What kind of medical care will be available to students



## DETAILED FINDINGS

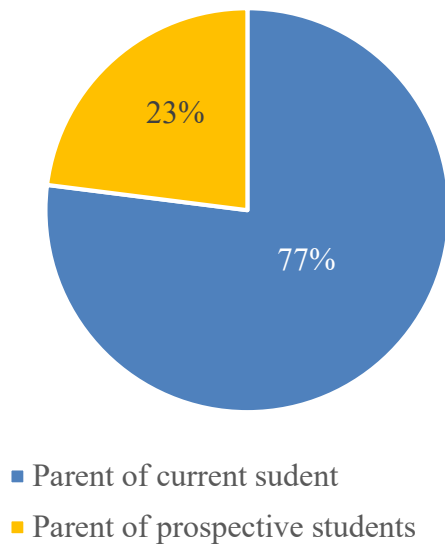




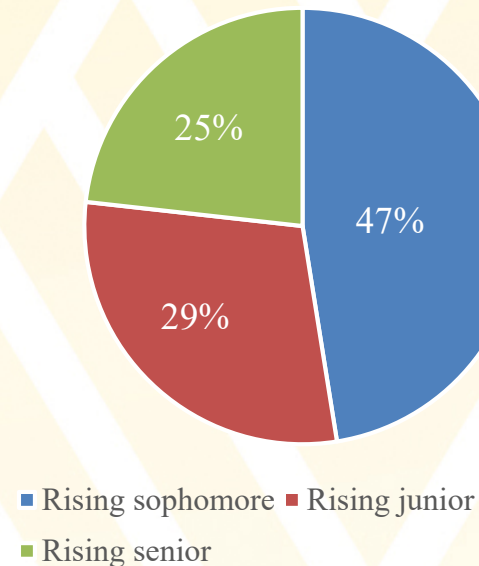
## RESPONDENTS

Most (77%) of the survey respondents are parents of current students. One quarter (25%) are parents of a rising senior; 29% have a rising junior and 47% are parents of a rising sophomore.

Current or Prospective



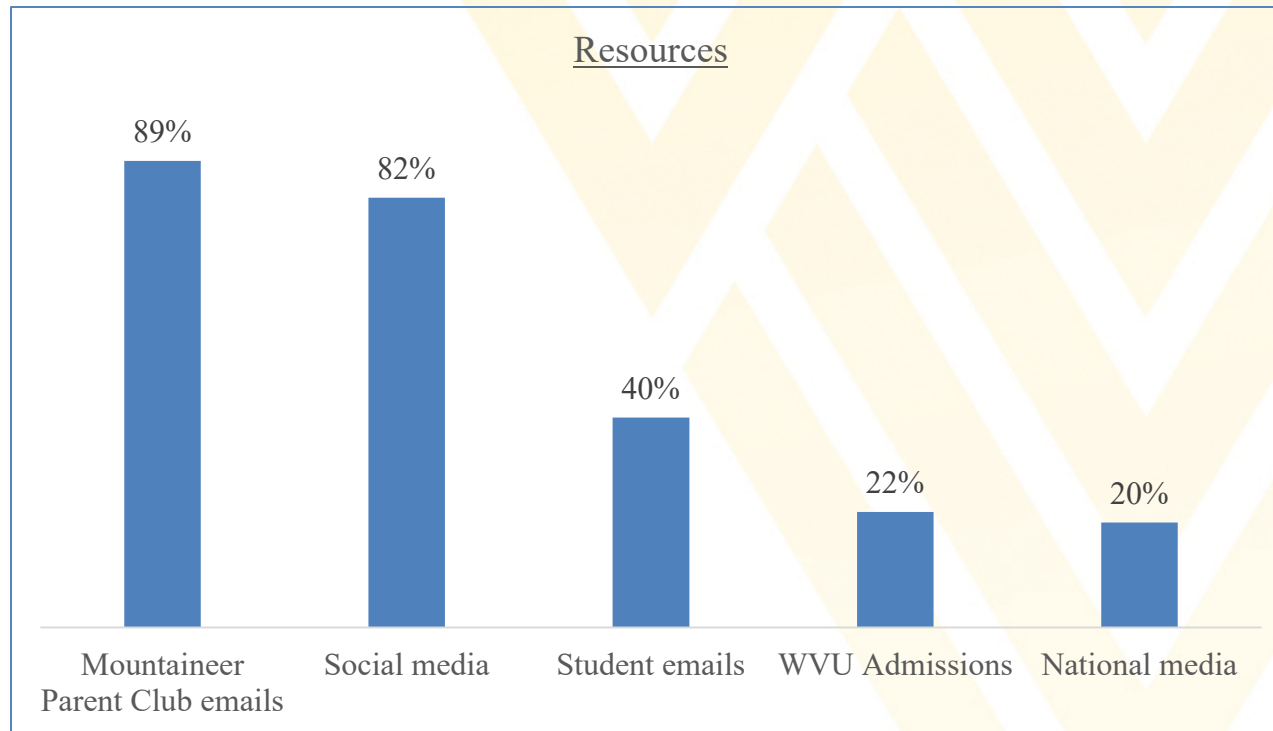
Class Level





## INFORMATION SOURCES

About nine in 10 (89%) parents have relied on news from the MPC regarding COVID-19. Slightly fewer (82%) have used social media. Far fewer read student emails (40%), accessed news from WVU Admissions (22%) or the national media (20%) when they sought news on WVU and the pandemic.

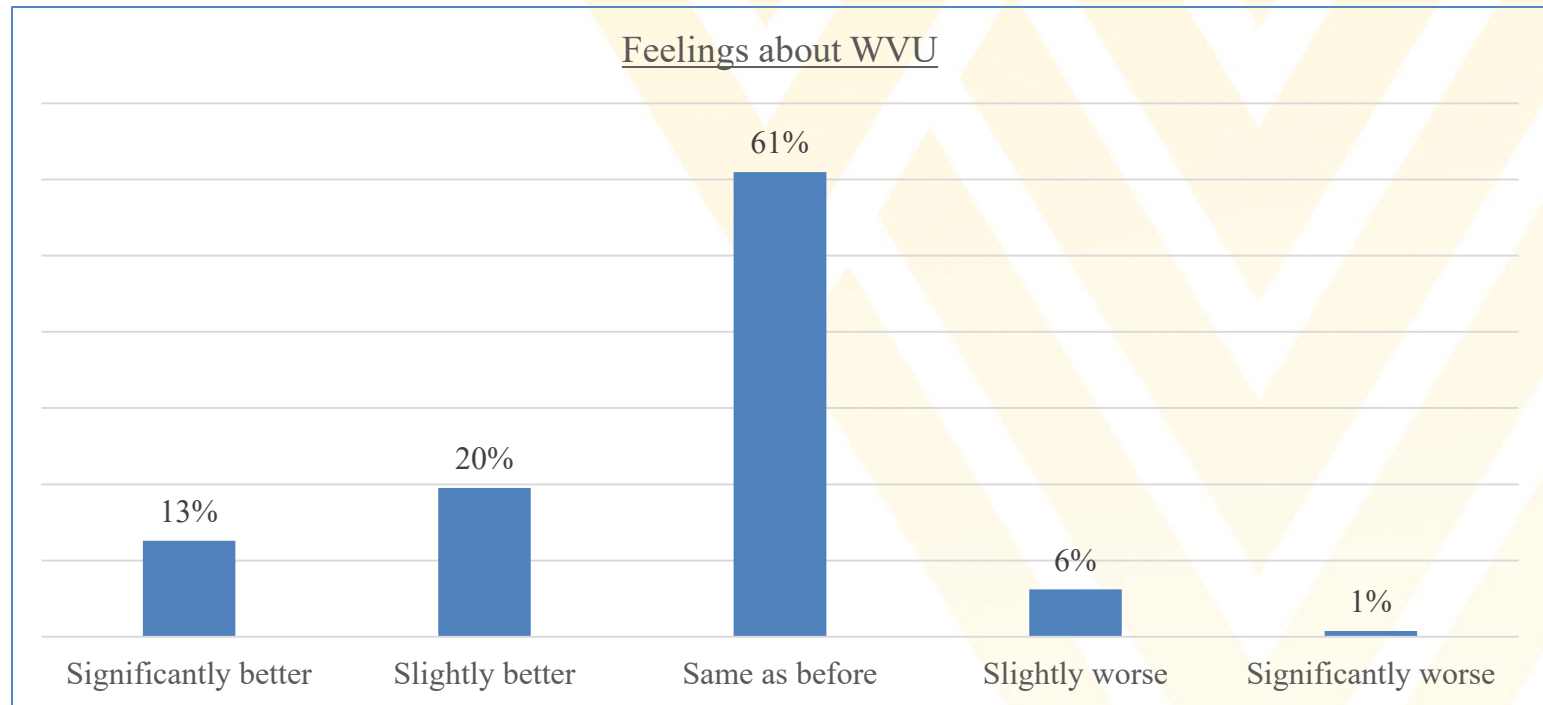


Q. Please check the resources you've used to learn about how WVU is dealing with the COVID-19 crisis.

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## REPUTATION

One-third (33%) of parents indicated their opinion of WVU has improved at least slightly since the outbreak of COVID-19. Another 60% said their opinion has not changed. Another 7% said their opinion of WVU has lessened since the pandemic began.

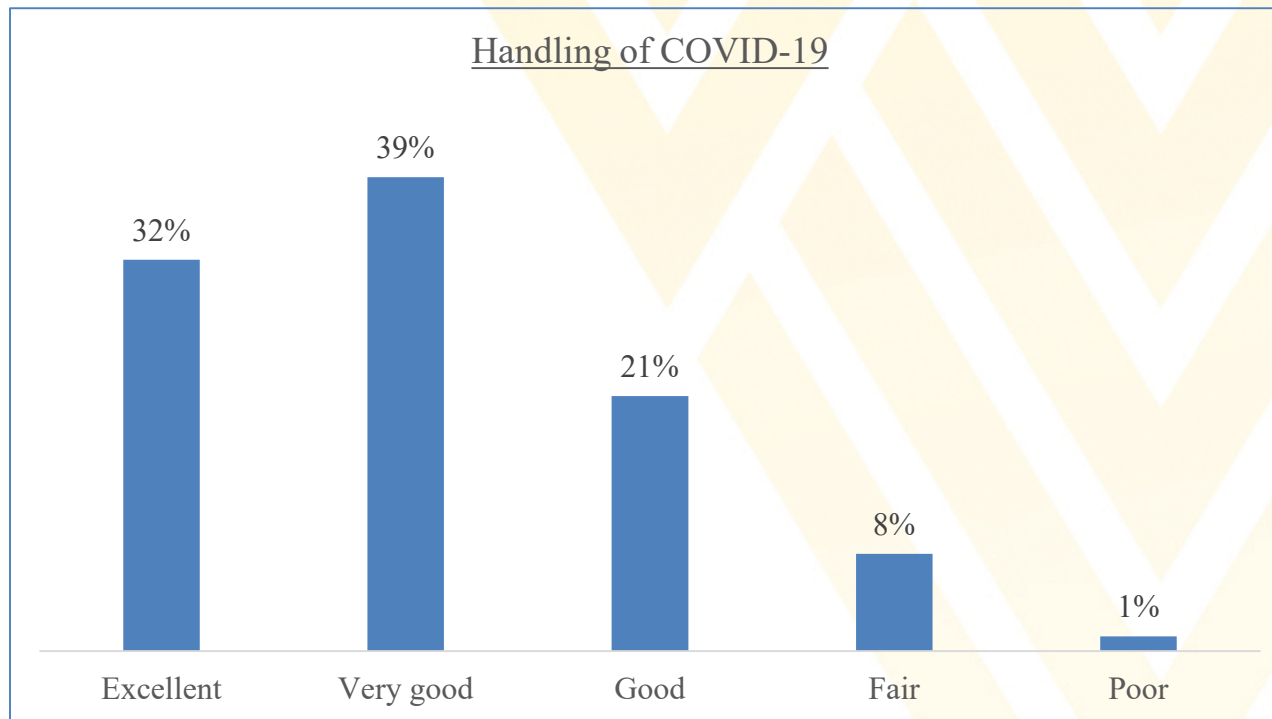


Q. How has your opinion of your WVU changed since the outbreak of COVID-19?

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### WVU AND COVID-19

About seven in 10 (71%) parents believe that WVU is doing an excellent or very good job handling the COVID-19 outbreak. Another 21% and 8% said University is doing a good or fair job, respectively. Just 1% rated WVU's handling of the COVID-19 outbreak as "poor."

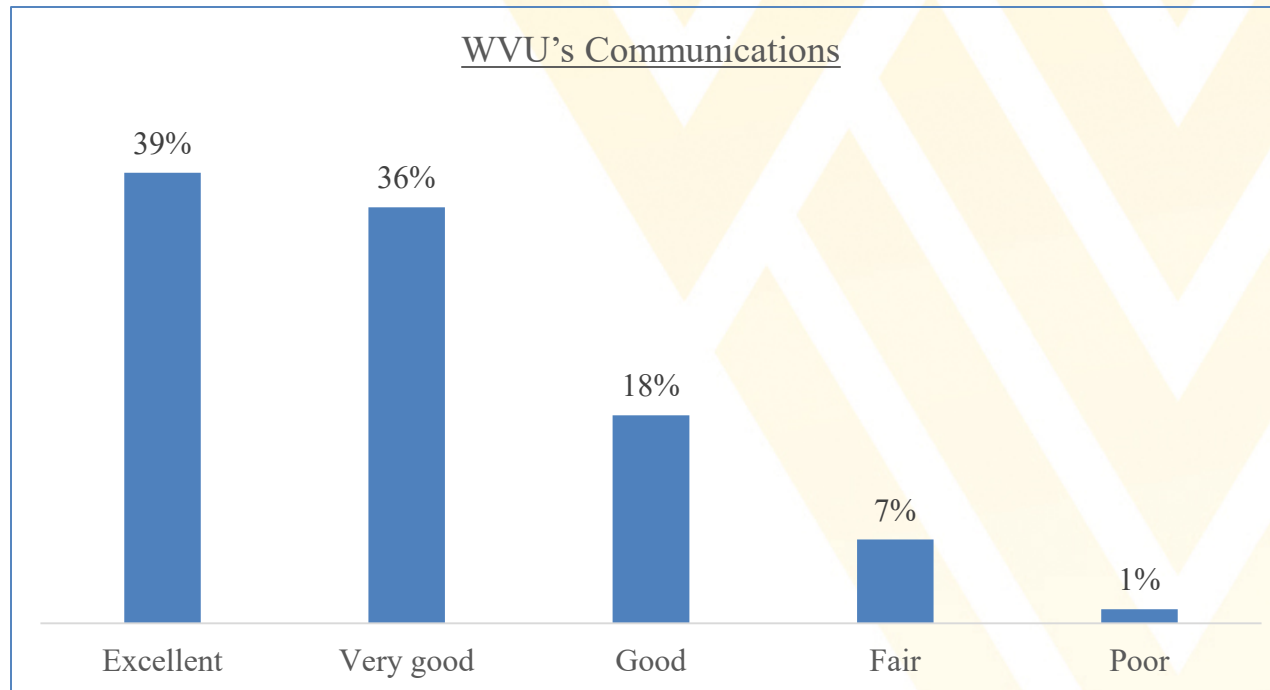


Q. How do you feel WVU is doing handling the COVID-19 outbreak?

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### COMMUNICATION AND COVID-19

Three-fourths (75%) of parents rated WVU's communication about COVID-19 as excellent or very good. Another 18% believe the communication regarding the pandemic is good; 7% said it's "fair" and 1% said it's been "poor."



Q. How would you rate WVU's communication with you about COVID-19? Q. Please explain why you've been less than satisfied with WVU's communication with you about COVID-19?

## RATED COMMUNICATION AS FAIR OR POOR

### PARENTS OF CURRENT STUDENTS

*"I think parents club has been fine with information . However when you have a student living off campus, who is communicating with the student about why and how they can come back to their apartments and life in Morgantown. Parents are living with students that want their independents back and the students need to be hearing from school with updates. Is there a organization on campus that is like a big brother to the off campus students. For information from the parents club is good for parents to give us a little connection to what is going on , but students need their own flow of information."*

*"Not as much concerned about the communication but the support and resources for the students. We've tried to reach advisors multiple times and no response!"*

*"I think communication has either come very late or there has not been enough interim communication. I understand that the Pandemic resulted in many unknowns, however it would have been helpful to receive occasional communications to touch base letting us know those issues were not forgotten."*

*"Staff is unavailable, unresponsive to student concerns. Questions and planning is left in tremendous limbo rather than regular updates. For example, summer session starts tomorrow and my son has received ZERO information about the online class in any form. Problems with bandwidth and connectivity have gone unanswered and concerns over the extraordinary low quality of on line class has gone unanswered. I cannot see continuing to pay out of state prices for subpar online classes."*

*"First my son just graduated ( I guess). But I am making this survey work so comments can be provided. I received no communications from WVU honestly not sure how I would have. I know they are adults but parents invest in this process and many foot the bill. I am WVU grad and wanted to see my son graduate. This pandemic is not WVU's fault BUT we did not even get his cap and gown. Still lost I guess or in a store not allowed to open or communicate? No parent information on graduation. Did he graduate? What was/when the virtual graduation? Rant over, just disappointment left. Moving on, but no plans to have another attend. Not worth the hype! Large and no support."*



Q. Please explain why you've been less than satisfied with WVU's communication with you about COVID-19?

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## COMMUNICATION AND COVID-19

### PARENTS OF PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

*“There haven’t been a lot of updates. When we are hoping for some normalcy for our child for the fall, we just want to feel more assured. The only time I’ve felt that WVU is planning to try to provide them that is when President Gee spoke.”*

*“My son will be an incoming freshman this fall, and we have had very little communication with the college.”*

*“Very little actual communication received. I also have a high school senior accepted at WVU and the amount of communication for his admission process and orientation has been even worse.”*

*“I’m having a hard time figuring out what the deadlines are. I’m not sure when I have to purchase a meal plan or pay the bill. It’s a little confusing.”*

*“My son just committed. We may not be on all the correct mailing lists.”*

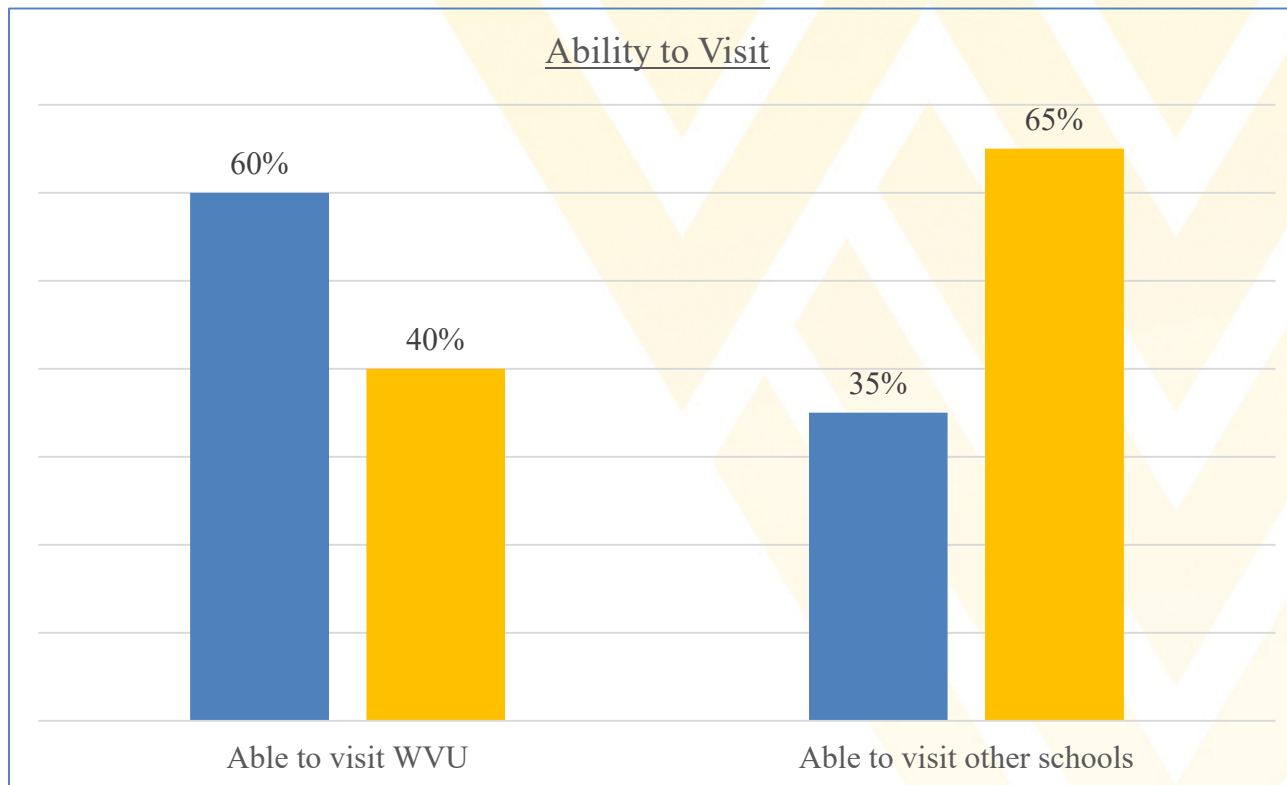
*“Social media is all I have gotten, most information has been shared from others’ newsfeeds.”*





## SCHOOL VISITS

Most prospective students (60%) were able to visit WVU, but not other schools, in-person.

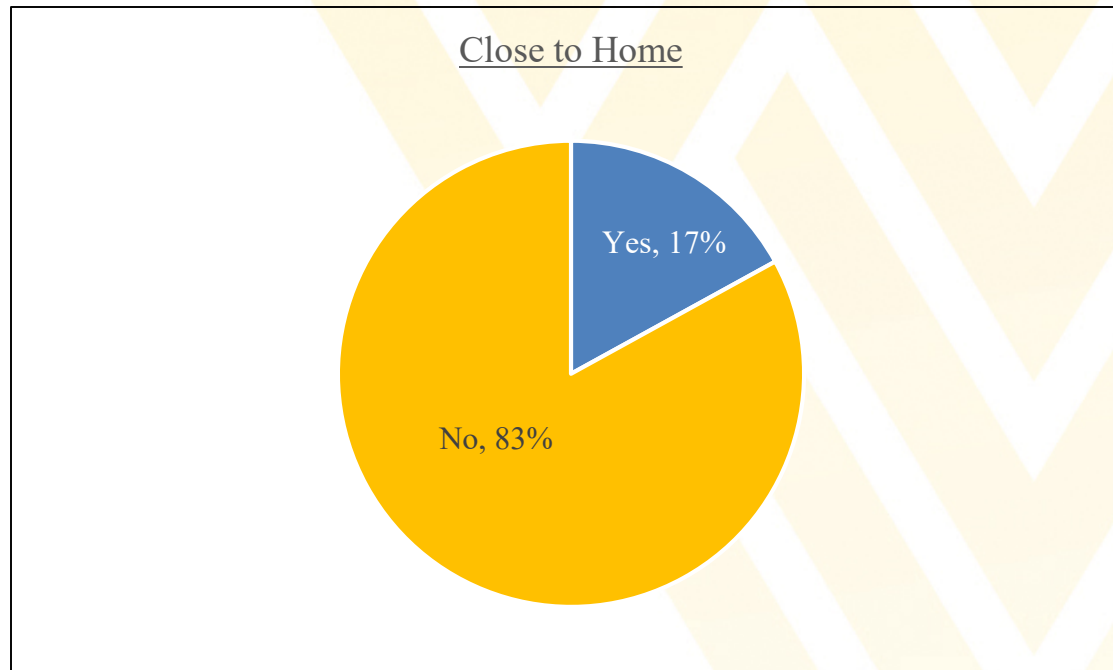


Q. Did COVID-19 impact your student's ability to visit WVU or any other school(s) in person?

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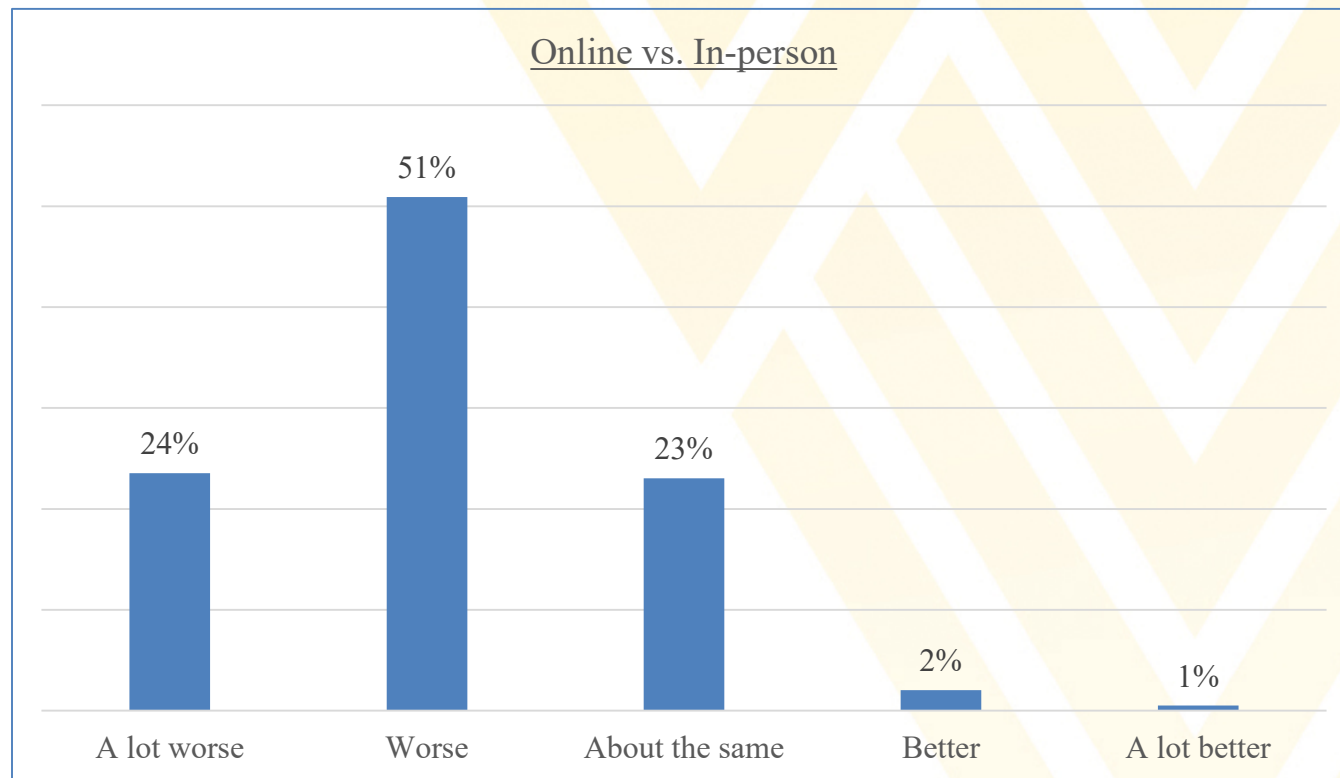
## LOCATION

Just 17% of parents of prospective students believe it is important that their student attend a school that is close to home.



### ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Three-fourths (75%) said their student recounted having a worse time with online instruction than in-person instruction. About one-fourth (23%) rated it about the same. The remaining 3% reported it was better to some extent.



Q. How did your student say their online instruction compared with the in-person instruction they received while at school?

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## ISSUES WITH ONLINE INSTRUCTION

*“I don’t have concerns for the fall, unless my student’s classes move to an online format again. She already missed out on her anatomy cadaver lab, and so many of her professors were so concerned about cheating that they made her finals nearly impossible with imposed time limits per question. It was an unfair format for the students, as ordinarily, she would have had time to review questions and answers before submitting. She’s majoring in Exercise Physiology, and her grades suffered as a result of lack of online instruction/exams.”*

*“My son really struggled to reach his professors. It was in clear when his final exams were scheduled. He did not receive the education we paid for and his GPA suffered. If campus is not open this fall he will not go. As a coaching major most of the best upper level classes are hands on.”*

*“Professors (chemistry specifically) had poor contact with students for 1.5 semesters and it continued through the closure. Professor would not answer questions about an exam which had been postponed when asked by my student why her answers were incorrect was told because they are. So when final rolled around had no way to study other than the incorrect information she had been given. It only takes one person not being understanding in the pandemic to put a bad light on the whole. That professor while portraying himself as an educator is definitely NOT an educator or a human being. However Katie Gallagher did a great job as did Lori Britton and President Gee. Other professors did a great job with building relationships with their students and understood the struggles they were having. However the one chemistry person was horrible.”*

*“Communication with students from professors for the last part of the semester in our experience was awful. Each professor had their own idea of how the new scenario should be treated. Some professors were more flexible than others. Some professors were better than others regarding having information available. I completely understand that the situation was unexpected, and everyone was trying to do their best, however, students suffered from the lack of coordination and clear direction (from their professors and from the administration to the professors). My student will have to retake classes, and pay tuition again, because online, self teaching just wasn't practical or well thought out. Needless to say frustrating and expensive.”*

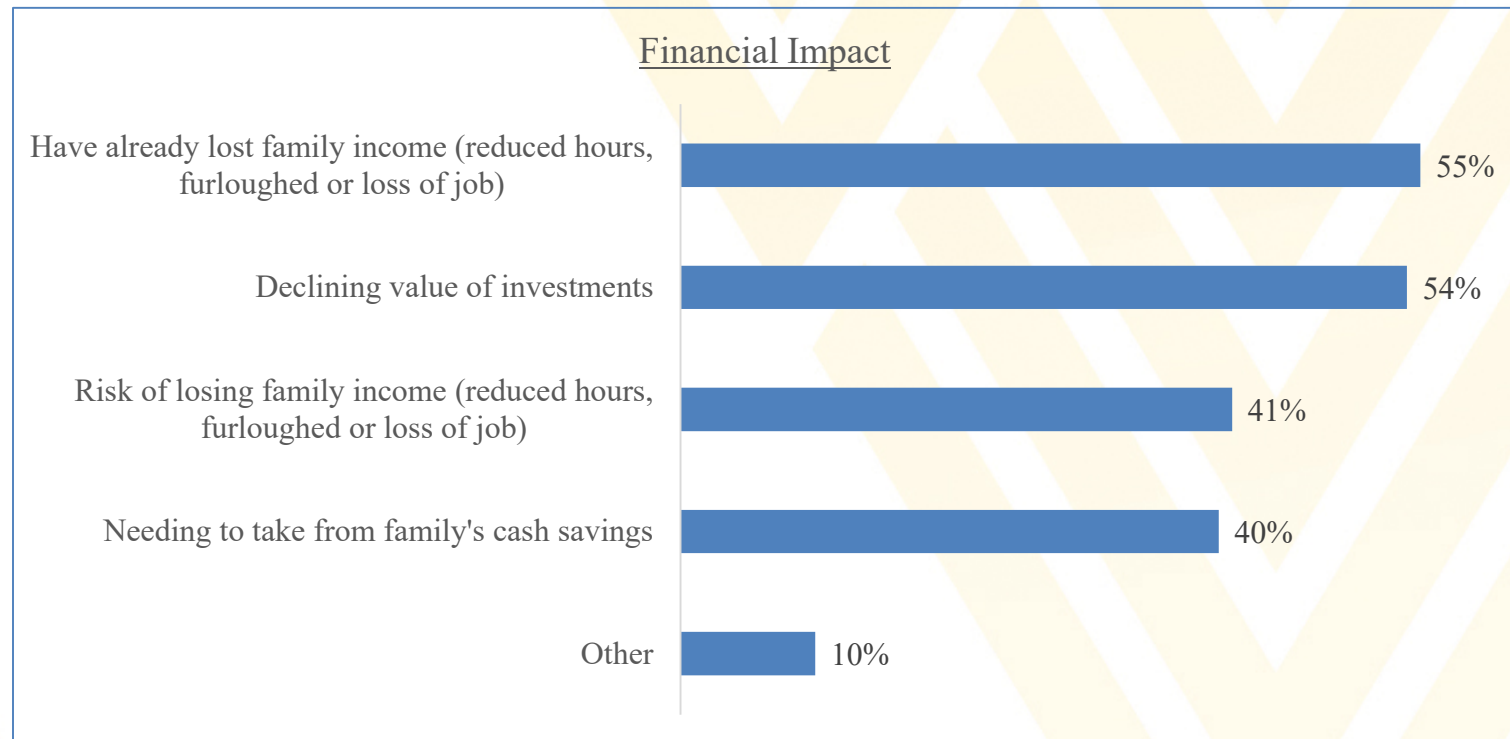


Q. How did your student say their online instruction compared with the in-person instruction they received while at school?

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### COVID-19 AND FINANCES

Six in 10 (60%) indicated their family's financial situation is being affected by COVID-19. Most cited a decline in the value of their investments (56%), as well as having family income reduced (50%). About four in 10 (39%) risk losing family income and 31% need to use their savings. "Other" responses are on the next page of this report.



Q. Thinking about your finances for a moment, is your family's financial situation being affected by COVID-19? Q. What factors are contributing to your concern over your family's financial situation? (check all that apply)



## COVID-19 AND FINANCES

### “Other” Responses

- Student lost/can’t get summer job (10)
- Additional miscellaneous comments:

*“Ability to get loans, financing”*

*“Significant impact on the 529 plan we use to pay for school.”*

*“Afraid to spend money because of uncertain future.”*

*“All of the above and concern that my student will have to pay out of state tuition to learn at home!”*

*“Pay cut.”*

*“Did not receive rent back from apartment after moving back home. That was wasted money and if the students go back in the fall and then get sent home again, we will be out of money again and to me, that is landlord's taking advantage of students.”*

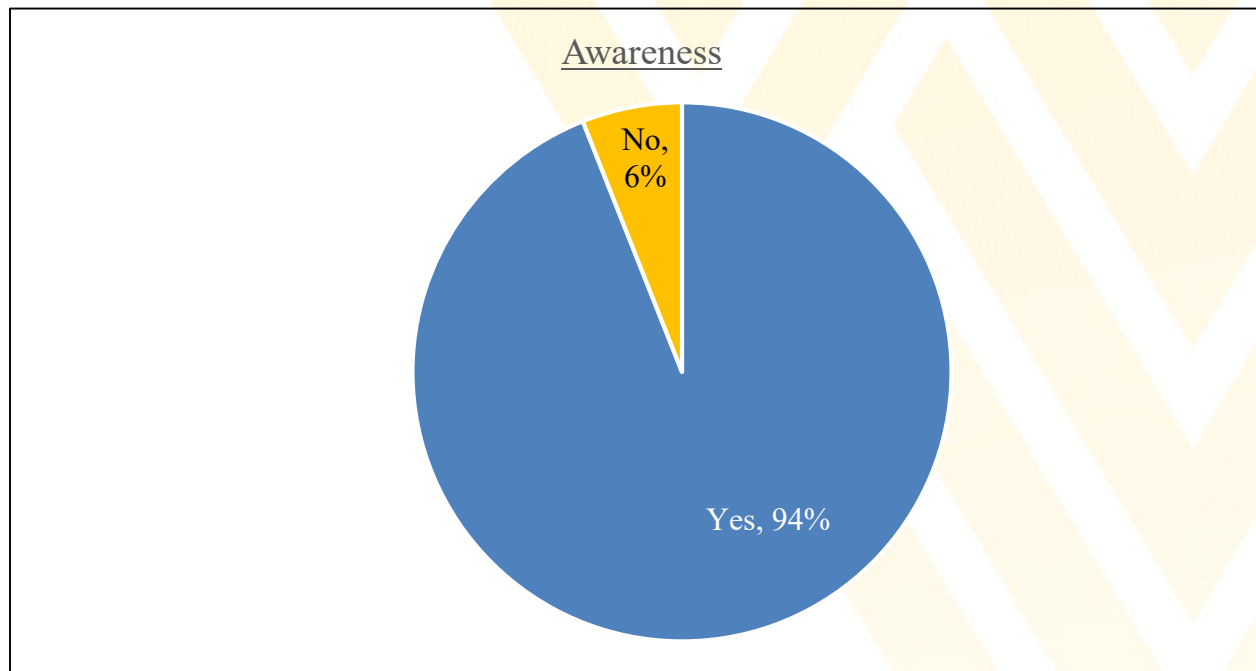
*“Lower grades due to online classes, risk of losing scholarships. A grace semester to get GPA back up would help.”*





### AWARENESS OF TUITION

All but 6% of parents were aware that WVU's tuition will not increase in the fall. Just 5% of parents of current students did not know this; all parents of prospective students were aware of it.

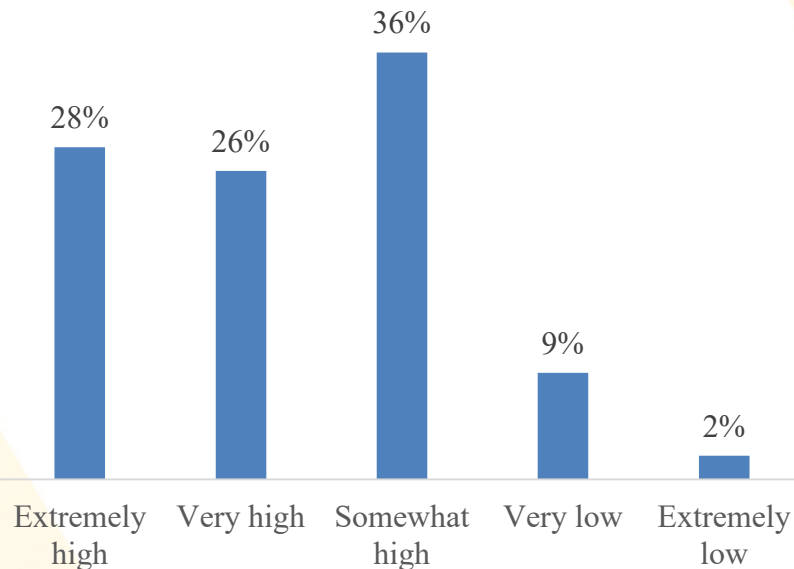


Q. Are you aware that WVU's tuition and fees will remain unchanged for the academic year beginning in August?

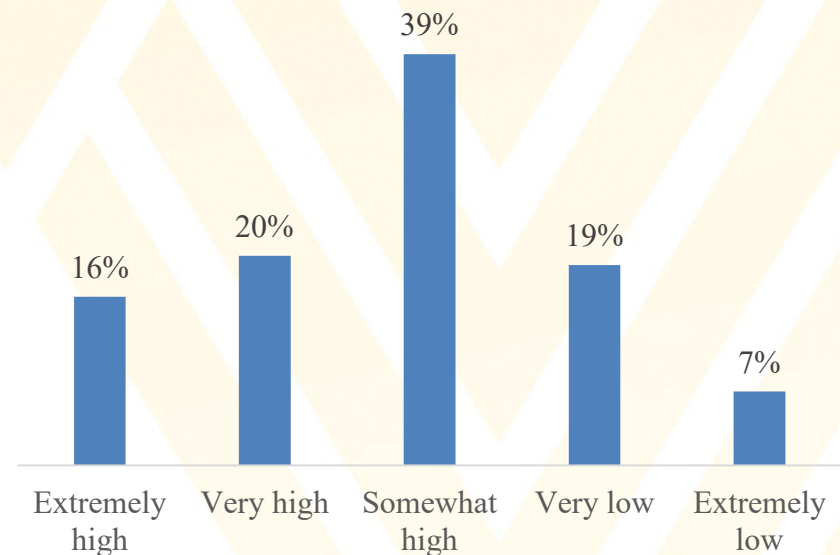
## ANXIETY LEVELS

Over half (54%) of parents of prospective students have a very or extremely high level of anxiety about their students attending college this fall. Regarding parents of current students, 36% are extremely or very anxious about their student returning to school. Most (39%) are somewhat anxious about it. Another 27% have very little or even less anxiety about it.

Concerned about Student Going



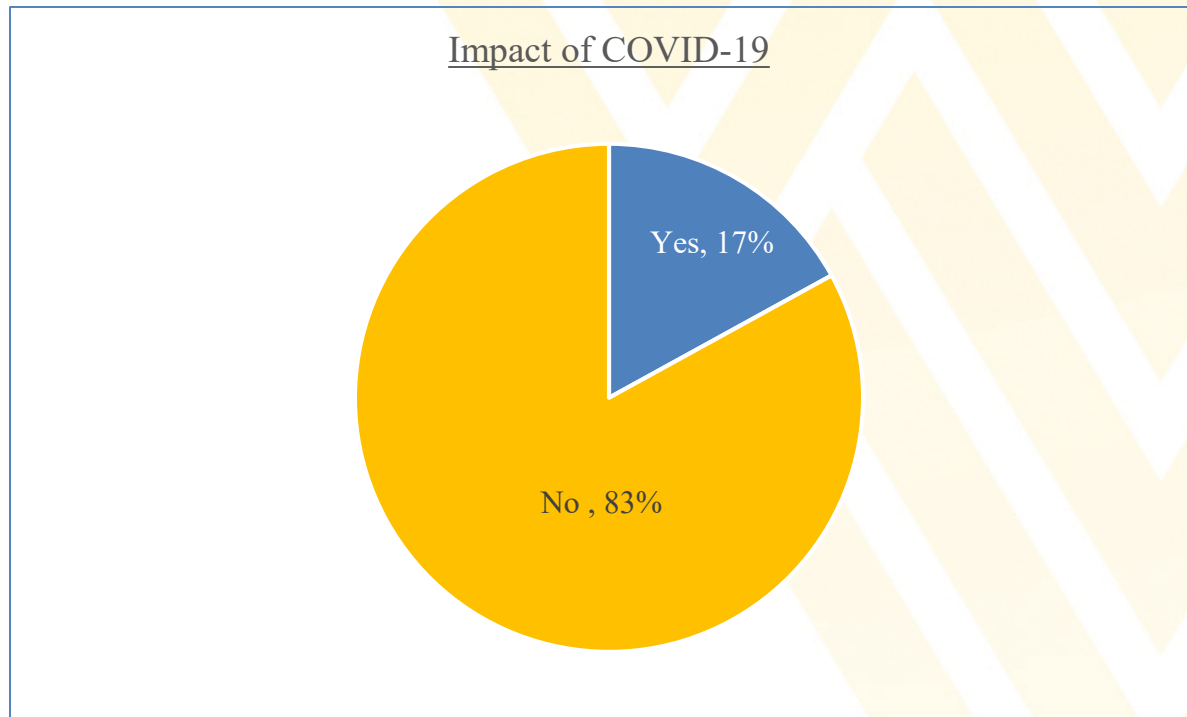
Concerned about Student Continuing



Q. Rate your level of anxiety about how COVID-19 may affect your student's ability to go to college this fall.  
Q. Rate your level of anxiety about how COVID-19 may affect your student's ability to continue their college education in the fall.

### COLLEGE SELECTION AND COVID-19

Less than two in 10 (17%) indicated their student's decision to attend or not attend WVU was impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak.



## COLLEGE SELECTION AND COVID-19

*“Still planning on attending, but it had led to multiple serious family conversations.”*

*“Not sure what to do.”*

*“Wanted to stay closer to home.”*

*“Being out of state, not sure how will go if online & expected to still pay the higher amounts for everything she is not using. Would like chance for her to take classes here & then still be able to come in NOT as a transfer.”*

*“Finances. Health concerns – alternate learning.”*

*“If online only in Fall will be a factor.”*

*“May defer a semester.”*

*“The cost and not knowing if she will be able to attend on campus. Paying out of state tuition and not having new experiences is expensive.”*

*“My son wants in person classes. Online classes are not an option for him. He needs structure and face to face teachings.”*

*“Unsure of what classes will look like in Fall semester. Unsure about safety precautions for resuming on campus classes. Financial concerns are substantial.”*



## COLLEGE SELECTION AND COVID-19

*“How will social distancing occur in large cramped classrooms. What value will my student receive if classes are moved online? What quality instruction will be if online must be resumed due to additional outbreaks of COVID-19, how will health resources be employed to care for ill students and the larger Morgantown community without being overburdened. Will WVU provide sanitizers to help keep students and their environment safe? How will classrooms be disinfected from class to class? What COVID-19 testing capabilities is the University going to have to minimize spread. What PPE gear will be available? How will classes deal with student absences for self-quarantine or recommended quarantine? If my Son comes home for the weekend will he be able to return without missing classes? How can campus realistically reopen under safe conditions when public health officials are warning of a resurgence of large scale reopening? I’m seriously considering having my son do a gap year until the virus is better contained and enough precautions are FULLY in place.*

*While I want to remain optimistic about reopening I am more concerned about my son’s safety and that of his peers. There is enough evidence showing that young people while less at risk, are still not immune to the spread of this virus, especially as more evidence is coming to light about the virus and the health effects it wreaks on the individual and society at large. I know my son can not handle the concept of spreading this virus unknowingly to another person. Right now WVU is spreading move out over an extended period of time with roommates moving at the same time. How can we trust our student will be safe in a little less than three months from now??? I’m extremely concerned as a parent. As an alum I know that WVU never experienced anything like this during my time there as a student. More communication regarding plans for the classroom and living experience are needed before I will allow my son to attend.”*



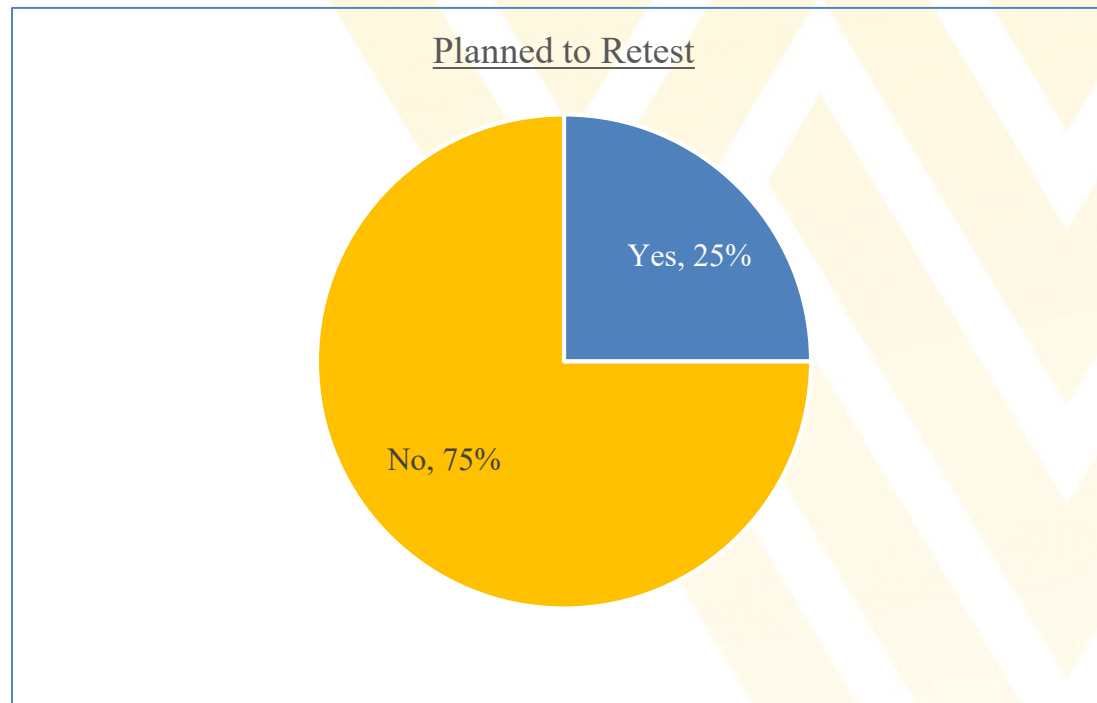
Q. Has your student's decision to attend or not attend WVU been affected in any way by the COVID-19 outbreak?

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### ACT OR SAT

One-quarter (25%) of parents of a prospective student noted that their student had planned to retake the ACT or SAT in the spring/summer.

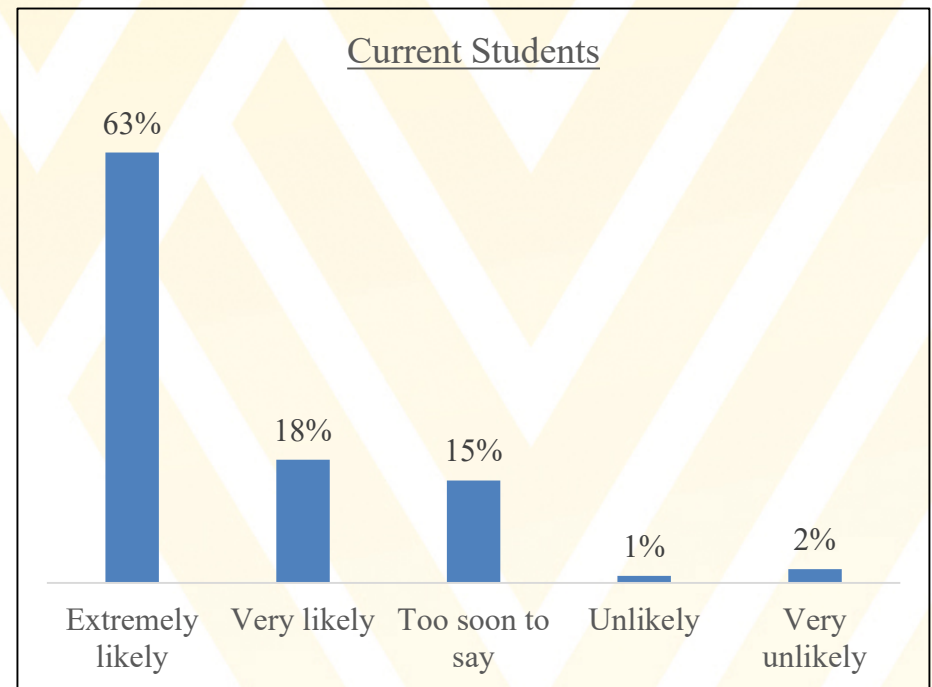
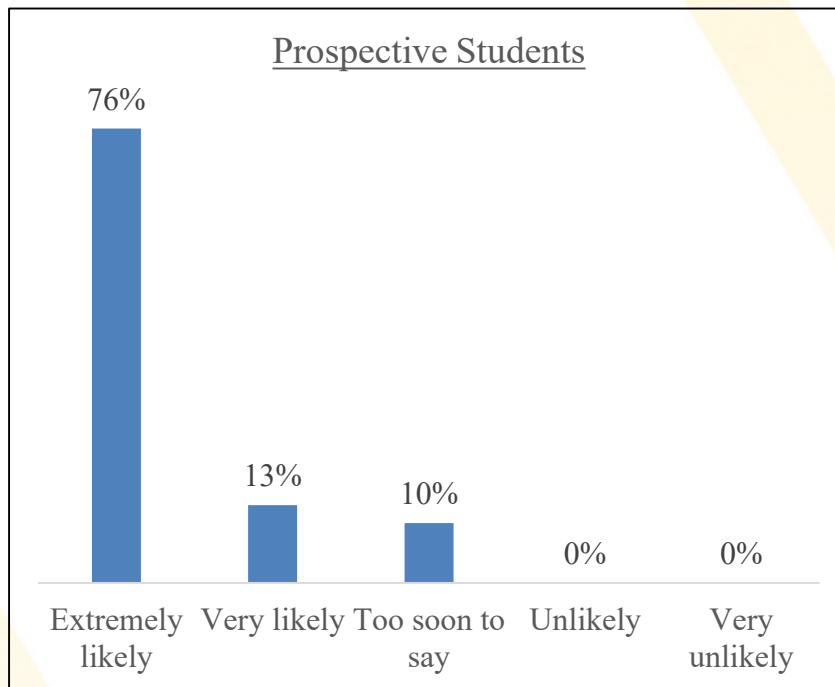


Q. Had your student planned to retake the ACT or SAT this spring/summer?



### LIKLIHOOD OF ATTENDING

All but 10% of prospective students and 19% of current students are likely to attend/return to WVU this fall. 10% of parents of prospective students and 15% of those with current students said it's too soon to say.

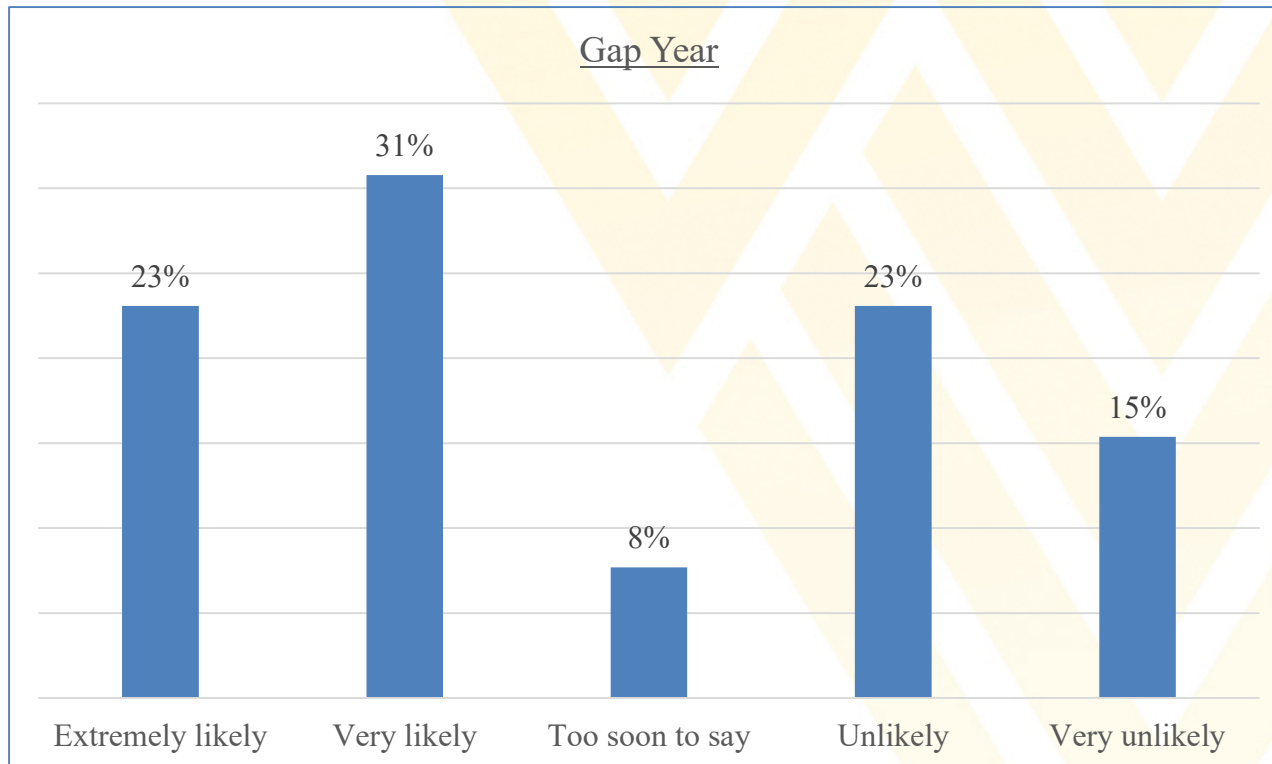


Q. How likely is your student to attend WVU? Q. How likely is your student to return to WVU for the fall semester?

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### GAP YEAR/SEMESTER

Over half (54%) of those parents who said their student is not likely to go to, or return to college, are extremely or very like to encourage their student to take a gap year or gap semester from college.

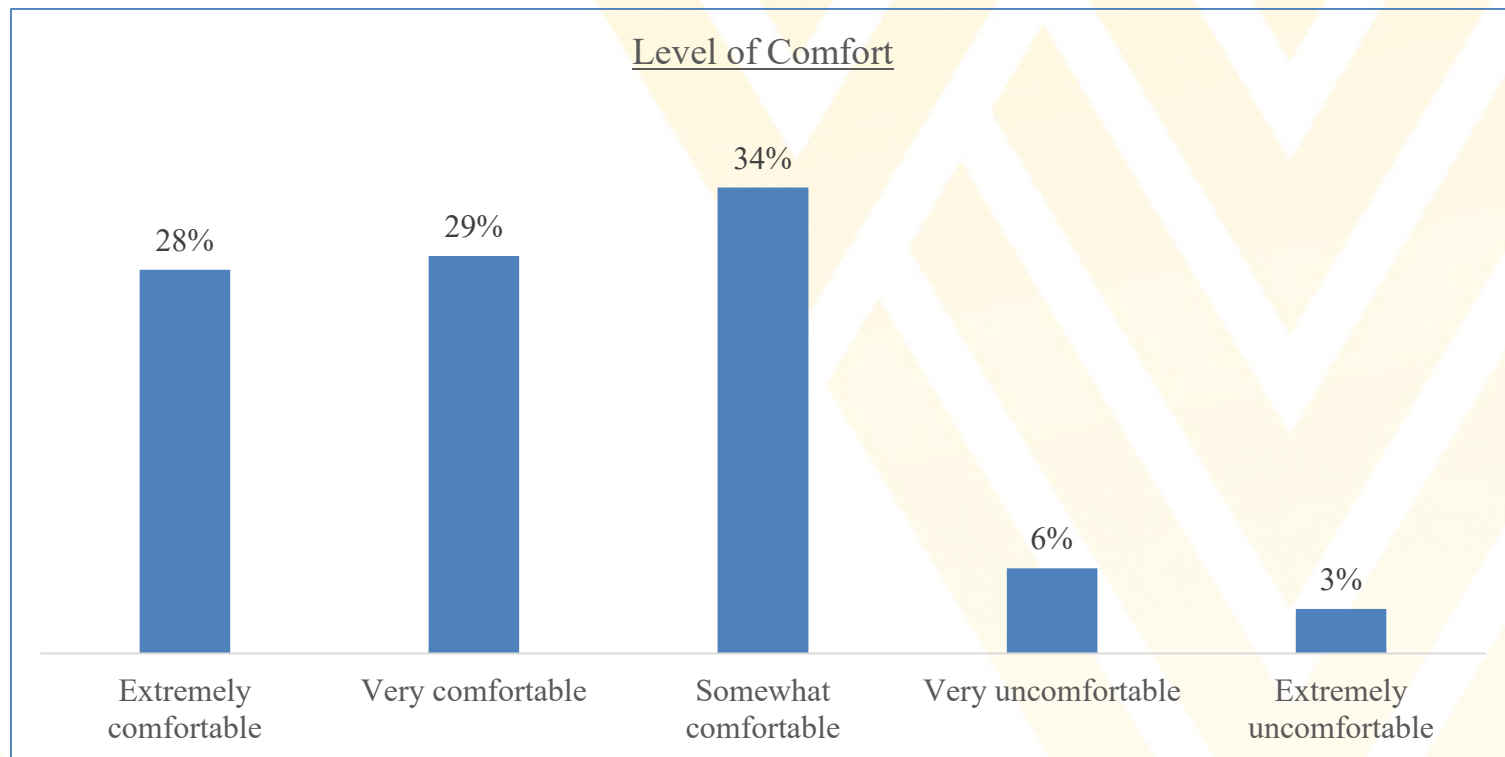


Q. How likely are you to encourage your student to take a gap year or gap semester - a break from college?

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### COMFORT WITH DECISION

Nearly six in 10 (57%) are extremely or very comfortable with their student returning to campus this fall. About one-third (34%) are somewhat comfortable with the decision. Just 9% are very or extremely uncomfortable with their student going back to campus.



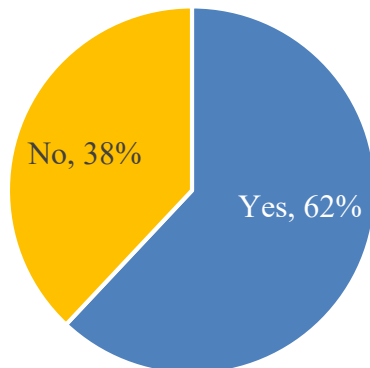
Q. As you know, WVU is planning to resume in-person courses for the fall semester. How comfortable are you with your student returning to campus this fall?

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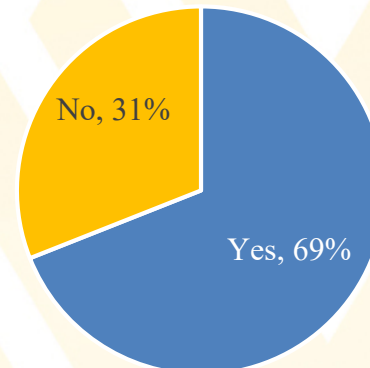
### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Just over six in 10 (62%) of parents of prospective students vs. 69% of current students want more information about what WVU will do to protect their student this fall.

Prospective Student



Current Student



Q. Do you feel you need more information about what WVU is doing to protect your student this fall?

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## AREAS OF CONCERN

When asked what concerns parents have regarding their students returning to campus in the fall, parents cited the following:

- Precautionary safety measures (22 mentions)
  - Residence halls
  - Class/class sizes
  - Dining halls
  - Transportation
  - Campus
- Switching to online classes (19 mentions)
- Handling of outbreaks (7 mentions)
- Enforcing social distancing, safety measures ( 5 mentions)
- Ensuring their student gets assistance if they get COVID-19 (2 mentions)

## Minimize risks

*“I am concerned, but feel the steps WVU is taking will minimize the risk as much as is possible. I do worry about the large groups of students that form for parties and such and wonder how that will be controlled. So far this hasn't been an issue for my students, but I'm also aware things can change quickly when it comes to young adults. I would be interested to hear of how the new policies will be enforced on campus and how crowd control will be handled, not parties, but as classes change in the buildings, in libraries, the Mountainlair, etc.”*



Q. What concerns, if any, do you have about your student being on campus in the fall? If you do not have any concerns, please type "NA" in the text box.

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- Social distancing

*“Class sizes, space between students during in-person classes.”*

*“How will you maintain social distancing? Will students in dorms be tested frequently?”*

- Ensure in-person classes

*“I worry about the health and well being of the students to include mental health/anxiety. Another concern is that my daughter is in the UClub apartments. She has not been in her apartment since Spring Break however since it's not a campus apartment we have to pay and are out of luck. I feel for students in my daughter's position, where in our opinion being home with family is best. We live 5 hours away out of state. She lives there solely because she attends WVU...so if the pandemic continues and all classes are online again we feel it's safest for her to be home. It's a hard pill to swallow to pay out of state tuition and for her apartment during this time. We signed a lease months ago for next year. I know these are unpredictable and unprecedented times, but I wish the university was able to help these students. There was a surge of cases last month tied to WVU students and the university expressed their belief that these students were in off campus houses and didn't leave as suggested. Again, I feel as though home is best during this pandemic, but my fear is to be paying out of state tuition and for an apartment next year while she is home.”*

- Cleaning protocol

*“Hoping for the best; I would like to be assured that the present mask situation continue and cleaning and filtration of the building system on top priority.”*

- Outbreaks

*“Quarantine if there is an outbreak, worried that my child might not have access to food and basic necessities if a quarantine would last for a long time. My child being in a close environment where not everyone might be considerate in practicing social distancing or wearing masks. How could the college possibly enforce all of the necessary precautions if 20,000 kids are in attendance? Not all of them are going to be careful.”*





## AREAS OF CONCERN

- Exposure to COVID-19

*"I am very concern about my child returning to campus and possibly being exposure to COVID 19. With kids coming back to school from many different locations and attending classes, and events in large groups I am concern about how he would be expected and able to practice social distancing and not be exposed to health risk. I'm also concerned about what happens when someone does come down with the virus. Are there plans to test everyone at the school to include faculty and workers?"*

*"My daughter has Crohn's Disease so it worries me about elevators, door handles etc. being cleaned thoroughly, as well as precautions to remove students who may be sick."*

- Consistent procedures

*"I'm unsure how social distancing can be carried out in the classrooms and in labs (including computer science labs) especially when they require partners to complete lab assignments. Also will they need to bring multiple masks when they return? How will public transportation on campus be able to handle the crowds of students who need to take the buses or PRT to get to classes on both campuses and arrive in time for class? This is sometimes difficult to achieve during a regular semester with no social distancing requirements."*

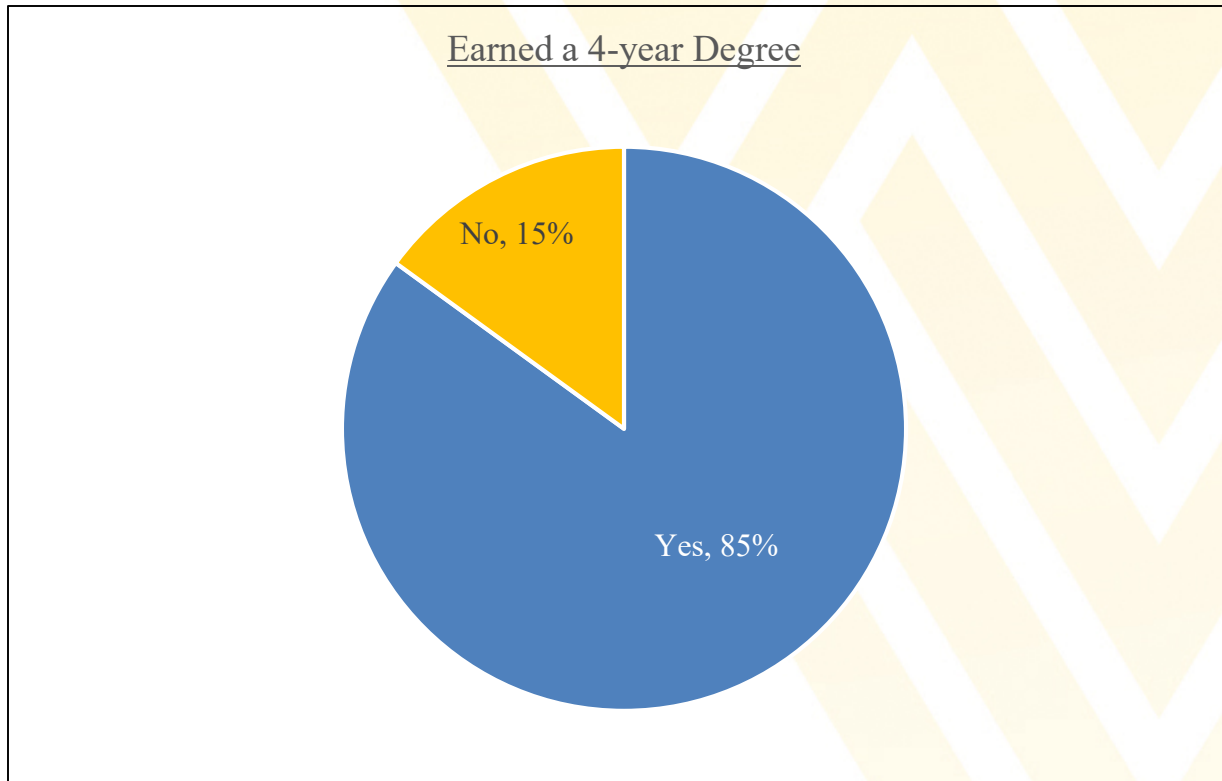
- Ensuring hands-on experience

*"My student is majoring in the science field, and online classes effectively cancelled his labs, and the current protocols are affecting summer internships mandatory for graduation. While the department has done a fair job communicating how they are tackling the issue, I am concerned about him missing vital hands-on experience that will help him be competitive in his chosen career field post graduation."*



## DEMOGRAPHICS

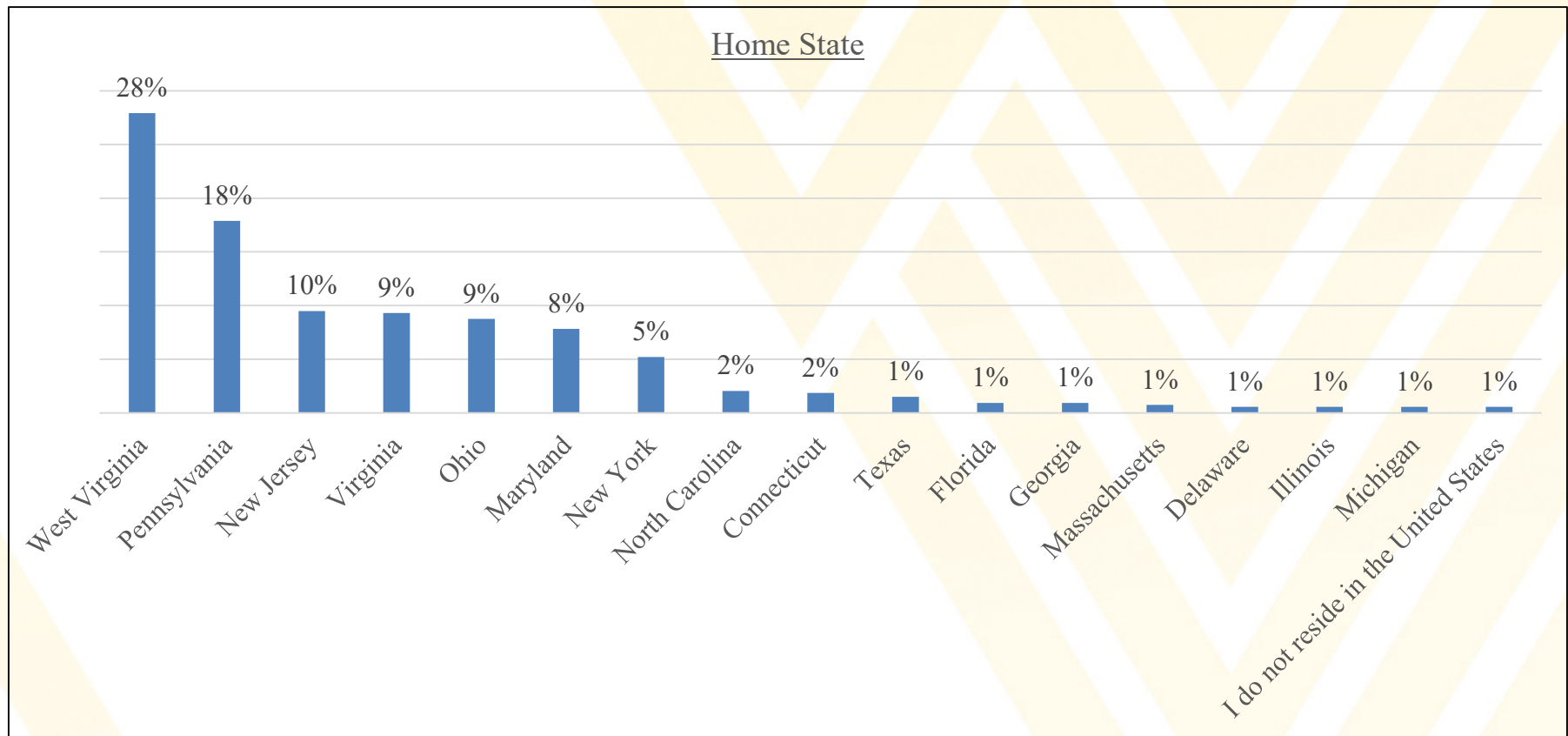
Only 15% of these parents or their spouses did not earn a 4-year college.



Q. The next few questions are for demographic purposes only. Have either you or your spouse completed a 4-year college?

## DEMOGRAPHICS

At least 5% of the parents who responded to the survey are from seven states: WV (28%), PA (18%), NJ (10%), VA (9%), OH (9%), MD (8%) and NY (5%).

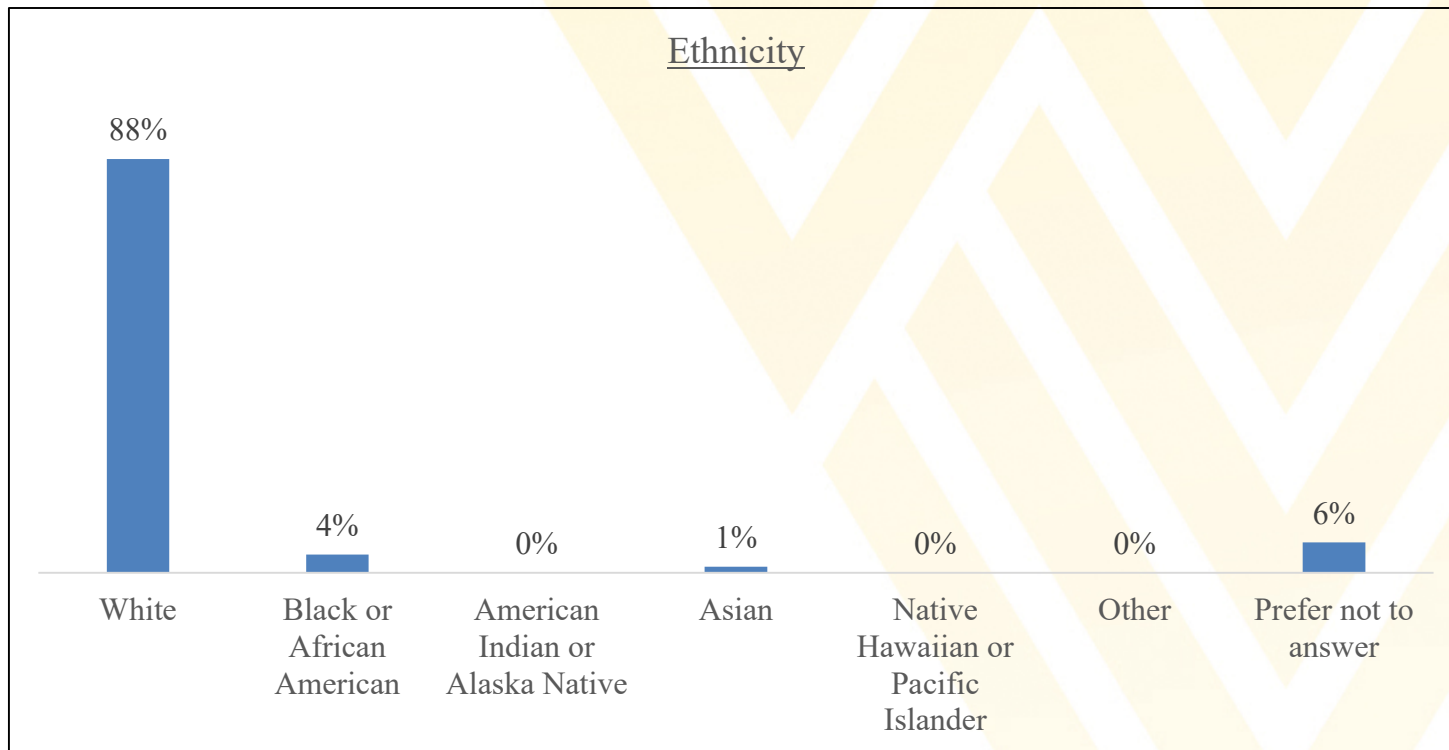


Q. In which state do you currently reside?

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the survey are white (88%).



APPENDIX





## VERBATIMS: ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

*“WVU made a quick change from in-person classes to on-line e-learning/on line courses. While the professors state that they made concessions for this change, my son was assessed an attendance penalty to his final grade that caused him to fail the course. This was not an attendance grade- this was a nine-point penalty for missing classes on zoom. His failing grade prevents him from graduating this Saturday. So yes, COVID 19 did effect my son's Senior Year at WVU, COVID 19 negatively impacted his grades and performance, WVU in my opinion hasn't done enough to mitigate the unexpected shift from in-person classes to on-line classes given there was no choice in the matter. Lets Go!”*

*“We pay out-of-state tuition. Next year we will have a Freshman and Sophomore at WVU. They will take a gap semester if there are no in-person classes. My concern is that the university will allow students on campus under of guise of a normal semester but then convert most of the classes online. Kind of like a bait and switch. I want to know upfront if any of the classes will be changed to online before we commit to the fall semester. This is very important that WVU show integrity in this matter.”*

*“We are in Texas. In the off case he does get sick, being so far away is difficult; however that is the case normally. I just hope he makes good decisions and can rely on friends if needed.”*

*“This situation is still too fluid for me to say one way or the other regarding fall. I'm not 100 percent convinced schools will be able to resume in August. I think we will have to see how the re-opening of the country goes first and if it goes well, I will feel more comfortable. There are ways to quarantine sick people without quarantining the entire campus/city/state/country. How will WVU accomplish this so that students can return to in-person learning and interaction? rtable that next semester will be more akin to some semblance of normalcy.”*

*“Will there be rapid testing on campus?”*



## VERBATIMS: ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

*“The experts agree that we are very likely to see an uptick in cases in the Fall based on the typical cycle of a coronavirus and other flus. Students will be coming in from all kinds of places - places with less control of their virus than has been West Virginia’s situation. Morgantown is one of the few hot spots in our state, but we are surrounded by states experiencing much higher rates. We will be bringing these exposures to WVU and to WV as a whole (because our students will come home at times).*

*I’m doubtful that air exchanges in classrooms are sufficient to keep fresh air circulating. I’m doubtful everyone will wear a mask of some sort - that should be required. I’m doubtful desks and other high-touch points will be sanitized between classes. I’m doubtful that tissues and hand sanitizer will be available in classes (gloves being controversial and all - but I don’t have a problem with them if properly used). How can we possibly educate in-person?*

*We should use the next few months to develop better methods for online schooling. It was thrust upon everyone suddenly, and I think that is part of the reason it was not particularly effective. We have time to improve. Once I’ve sent my students off to school, how can I bring them home to my vulnerable home? If they get sick, how can I care for them? Are you going to do it? I know these are difficult decisions all around, and I know our U needs to survive, too, as well as our Morgantown community. Even if I can keep my students hermits for all but classes, their peers will be out at the bars, in the gyms, and partying in large groups. We all know where that leads. Once the students are back on campus, you’ve lost control of the situation. I’m scared. I know we need to return to ‘the new normal,’ eventually, but I don’t think we can truly do that before we have a large quantity of vaccine - and I think our return to classes is precipitous if we do not consider that we are putting students in charge of the spread of this disease. Which is what we will be doing. Thank you for allowing me to reach out to you with this survey.”*

*““Primary concern is continuing to attend WVU at main campus and not through an online Distance Learning Program. If WVU will have a regular class format, then he’ll be back to school most likely. If WVU continues with an online distance learning format, then he’ll take some time off from school. Other concern is, the ability to live in one of WVU’s Dorm rooms. We would rather he live in the Dorm in the Fall with a meal card than off campus.”*



## VERBATIMS: ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

*“Paying tuition... WVU should provide maximum protection for my student at NO additional cost. There are other funds/grants that can be tapped for extraordinary costs. WVU is a public college- find the money - parents are struggling to keep students there so don't dump cost on students. Cut sports before increasing academic career student like bio and legal!”*

*“My concerns are regarding an overuse of 'online' content. We need to return to in-person instruction, which is what college is all about. Parents are not going to pay regular tuition (and they're certainly not going to pay for lodging/food) for students to matriculate via online resources. It may be a supplement (and that's questionable) but it is certainly NOT a replacement for standard instruction.”*

*“My biggest concern (with of course safety measures in place) is how and if there will be actual classes in the Fall. It was very difficult for my student to do the online classes without an actual class and professor guiding him. There is also the monetary investment we are making into his education. While I understand the measures that were put in place this spring, going into Fall I am hoping there will be a more traditional way to learn rather than just online. As an out of state student that we pay full tuition for that is important to us. I can not see paying 36,000 dollars (room, board and tuition) for him to sit in his apartment online. But he loves the school and his adviser has been awesome in helping to guide him not just through this but he had a little hiccup between his first year and coming back this year and ended up taking a year off and his adviser kept in touch and helped him to do the right things to get back on track.”*

*“There is minimal information about moving out of university housing (university apartments, specifically) and my child has left their belongs for over 2 months now and it's nerve wracking having all of their stuff their without knowing what's going on. Especially with the video that a WVU staff member was stealing from the dorms.”*

